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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews and synthesizes a broad range of research studies and theoretical essays related to the transition to fatherhood. This literature suggests that the transition to fatherhood can best be described as a set of normative developmental events that occur during the life course. In addition, while transformation into the role of father is a critical stage for individual development, the process takes place within the context of small social systems, such as dyads, nested within families or family-like environments. In order to understand fatherhood experiences, the review analyzes the fathers' relationship with his child, his child's mother, and the functioning of the family as a unitary social entity. Larger social networks, such as extended families and families of origin, affect the process of role change among new and expectant fathers; these networks are examined as well. Finally, the special case of early role transition to fatherhood among adolescents is a major topic reviewed in this paper. Implications for research and practice are discussed. (Contains 66 references.) (Author/KB)

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by

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Role Transitions: A Review of the Literature

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Abstract

A broad range of research studies and theoretical essays related to the transition to fatherhood are reviewed and synthesized in this paper. This literature suggests that the transition to fatherhood can best be described as a set of normative developmental events that occur during the life course. In addition, while transformation into the role of father is a critical stage for individual development, the process takes place within the context of small social systems, such as dyads, nested within families or family-like environments. In order to understand fatherhood experiences, the author analyzes the father's relationships with his child, his child's mother, and the functioning of the family as a unitary social entity. Larger social networks such as extended families, and families of origin affect the process of role change among new and expectant fathers and they are examined as well. Finally, the special case of early role transition to fatherhood among adolescents is a major topic reviewed in this paper. Implications for research and practice are discussed.

The National Center on Fathers and Families (NCOFF) is a policy research center that is practice-focused and practice-derived. Based at the University of Pennsylvania, NCOFF's mission is to improve the life chances of children and the efficacy of families by facilitating the effective involvement of fathers in caring for, supporting, and advocating on behalf of their children. Efforts are organized around three interdependent approaches: program development, a policy research and policymakers engagement component, and dissemination activities. NCOFF's research plan is developed around seven "Core Learnings," distilled from the experiences of programs and agencies serving fathers, mothers, and children around the country.

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Role Transitions: A Review of the Literature

by Will J. Jordan

This paper is a review of the social and behavioral science research literature on the transition to the role of fatherhood. Adult and adolescent males undergo this transition within the context of dyadic relationships (either married, or unmarried couples; with resident or non-resident fathers). The male-female couples raise their children within a larger social and familial network of relatives, friends, and acquaintances. Indeed, intimate male-female relationships can be viewed as small social systems because they contain a structure, psychological orientation, and set of norms that guide their behavior. In addition, within intimate male-female relationships there is a division of labor, which is often influenced by gender. To the extent that core values are shared between males and females, they are able to bond with each other. However, a major contemporary issue is that males and females are not sharing core values and are not bonding within relationships. In light of the social contexts within which one becomes a parent, it would be misleading to examine the dynamics of the transition to fatherhood without making reference to the styles of adjustment among fathers, along with other crucial social actors such as the child, the child's mother, and extended families.

Throughout the developmental stages of life, males and females experience critical changes in their perspectives and social roles as they progress from birth to old age. These attitudinal and behavioral changes generally involve growth and maturation into a new set of circumstances and adaptation into different social roles. In adapting to changing social roles, we learn new norms and modify our value system. The roles we play are adjusted over time or replaced as we transition from one stage to the next. The key stages of life involving significant transformation include going to school for the first time, leaving home, getting married, and having children (Barnhill et al., 1979). Although there are cultural, gender and individual variations in our transition through the life cycles, we invariably proceed through a relatively orderly and predictable set of developmental stages. However, orderliness of life transitions are broken down by early parenthood, especially that which occurs before completing secondary school and acquiring marketable job skills. Still, while development through infancy and childhood has been researched extensively (Erikson, 1963), the research community has gathered less knowledge about the complexities of the transition to adulthood — particularly parenthood (Bozett, 1985).

Much of the research on the transition to parenthood focuses primarily on intact married couples having their first child (Belsky et al., 1985; Goldberg et al., 1985; Hobbs & Wimbush, 1977; Miller & Sollie, 1977). Hobbs and Wimbush's authored one of the rare studies which examined the transition to parenthood among Black couples. In each of these studies, the effects of the first-time pregnancy and the introduction of the child on marital relations and individual maturation is typically addressed. Because most analytic tools in social science are linear and reductionistic the effects of second and later births are seldom studied. However, one study of the effects of the second child (Steward, 1990) found that fathers become more integrated into daily home life after the birth of their second child.

There is considerable literature on first-time pregnancies and births among adolescents (mostly out-of-wedlock), but this should be differentiated from the transition to parenthood literature. There are some studies of repeat pregnancies among adolescents, but again primarily from a prevention perspective. Also, research on the experiences of parenthood in non-nuclear families — for example, among single-parent or alternative family structures — has been widely conducted on adolescents (Hagan & Wheaton, 1993; Howell & Frese, 1982; Lorenzi et al., 1977; Russell, 1980). However, there is a gap in the literature on the effects of the transition to parenthood on adults who never marry and who, together with their children, maintain non-traditional relationships.

The transition to motherhood has been studied in far more depth than fatherhood (Phares, 1992). There are several explanations for the lack of investigation into the experience of fatherhood, including a basic assumption that mothers are less difficult to recruit for scientific study. In addition, core values about the purpose of fathers, along with established theories of human development, have limited research in this area. For example, in developmental theory it is often assumed that the role of the father is less critical than the role of the mother, because mothers are the primary caretakers of infants, both nurturing them and giving affection (Parke, 1981; Phares, 1992). This belief was based on a notion that emphasized the centrality of mothers in infant development and their unique role as a primary socializing agent (Parke, 1981). Correspondingly, fathers were perceived primarily as spectators in the rearing of their children whose influences were indirect at best. Parke points out, however, that both parents have the potential to be attachment figures for their children. There is no scientific evidence that infants attach to their mothers any more than they attach to their fathers when the amount of parental involvement is comparable.

The transition to fatherhood has been studied through various theoretical lenses. These theoretical perspectives on fatherhood can be best understood within the context of broader perspectives on *parenthood* being applied to fatherhood. Several decades ago, the early sociological literature described the transition to parenthood, in general, as a *"crisis"* (Dyer, 1963; LeMasters, 1957), characterized by anxiety, depression, and uncertainty about the future. More recent evidence suggests that fathers experience conflicting feelings about themselves, their wives and their children during the pregnancy and after childbirth (Osofsky & Culp, 1989). While pregnancy and childbirth are unquestionably stressful events for females, they have also been described as overwhelming events for males (Cowan et al., 1985; Klein, 1985; Wente & Crockenberg, 1976).

The "process model of parenthood" (Belsky, 1984), which holds that parental functioning is determined by multiple factors, adds to our understanding of the transition to fatherhood. According to Belsky, sources of contextual stress and support either directly affect parenting or indirectly affect parenting by first influencing the psychological well-being of the individual parent. In turn, the parent's own personality influences the contextual stress or support he or she experiences and this creates a feedback loop which again affects parenting. Further, the process model suggests that, "in order of importance, personal psychological resources of the parent are more effective in buffering the parent-child relation from stress than are contextual sources of support, which are themselves more effective than characteristics of the child." (p.83)

Notwithstanding the conflict and change that accompanies the anticipation of becoming a father, some researchers described the transition to fatherhood as part of a *"normal progression"* through the life stages (Miller & Sollie, 1977; Osofsky & Culp, 1989). Rapoport (1963) asserted that referring to parenthood as a *"crisis"* exaggerates reality because becoming a parent, however stressful it may be, is a normal aspect of adult life. Thus, the expression *"normal crisis,"* according to Rapoport, was a more accurate depiction of parenthood.

While some upheaval and emotional distress is likely to occur, particularly among first-time fathers (Klein, 1985), these reactions are common to most significant role transitions. For example, young adults often experience anxiety, uncertainty and fear upon moving out of their parent's home, or leaving for college. The transition to parenthood is another critical life event that is often characterized by disruption of customary behavior (McHale & Huston, 1985). These kinds of life events typically involve fundamental changes in interpersonal relationships and affect how people view themselves, their future, and their significant others. Progressing through life events often involves learning new skills, norms, and modes of adaptation, as well as a readjustment of priorities.

This paper reviews the research literature on the critical issues pertaining to transition to the role of fatherhood. It reviews an array of studies, from several disciplines, outlining major issues and themes. It further examines the complexity of problems associated with adolescents who make an untimely transition to fatherhood. The paper is organized in two main parts: a review and analysis of the major issues involved in the transition to fatherhood; and a brief discussion of the implications of this literature for research and practice.

An Overview of the Issues

In order to frame the transition to fatherhood, four general issues are addressed in this paper: 1) stability and change in the transitions to parenthood; 2) the consequences of father involvement; 3) the impact of the transition to fatherhood; and 4) the transition to the role of father among adolescents. In the section on stability and change in the transition to parenthood, as well as in other areas of the paper, research on both mothers and fathers will be examined. This is done because, in some cases, what was learned through research on mothers is also relevant to research on fathers. The aim here will be to highlight some common stressors of parenthood. Second, in exploring the consequences of father involvement an attempt will be made to address gaps in the literature. An array of methodological, practical and bias-related factors are said to be responsible for the lack of investigation into fathers' influence on their children's psychosocial development. (King, 1994; Phares, 1992).

Third, much of the recent literature on the transition to fatherhood centers on changes that occur in the father himself as well as in his relationship with his child and child's mother. But since the role of the father is multi-dimensional and is continually being redefined (Parke, 1981), it follows that individuals and groups differ in how they experience fatherhood. There will be some discussion in this section of fatherhood throughout the life course, and intergenerational considerations.

Finally, given that parenthood may be tumultuous during any stage of the life course, the special case of adolescent fathers will also be examined. The final sections of this paper gives much attention to research on fatherhood during adolescence, discussing its effects on outcomes such as educational attainment, psychological stability,

employment and future marital status. It is stressed, however, that teenage fathering is both a cause as well as a result of prevailing social conditions. That is, the probability of becoming a parent during the adolescent years is influenced by social conditions such as socioeconomic disadvantage and ineffective schooling; but having a child also effects the future life chances of adolescent (Geronimus, 1991). Thus, in the case of the consequences of adolescent fatherhood, cause is often effect and effect is often cause.

While the transition to parenthood for adults can be described as a normal progression through life's stages, there is consensus among researchers that childbearing during adolescence creates abnormal stress and can have detrimental outcomes (Hagan & Wheaton, 1993; Howell & Frese, 1982). Despite pre-existing differences between adolescents who do and who do not become teenage fathers, there is some evidence that adolescent fathers risk experiencing an embroidery of unique challenges (Hagan & Wheaton, 1993; Howell & Frese, 1982; Lorenzi et al., 1977; Russell, 1980). For example, becoming a father during adolescence increases the risk of foreclosing educational attainment, especially post-secondary education, (Marsiglio, 1986; Russell, 1980) and jeopardizing future economic chances as an adult.

But pregnancy itself is merely one of the risks of sexual activity among adolescents. Along with risks to the adolescent's long-term educational and career goals and expectations are immediate health risks. The recognition that sexually transmitted diseases, particularly AIDS, pose a major risk to sexually active teenagers has led schools and health agencies to educate both young women and men about safer sex practices (Sonenstein, Pleck & Ku, 1993). In addition, when pregnancy occurs among adolescents there is high probability that it was premarital and unplanned. Even if the couple decides to marry subsequently, their union is likely to suffer financial and emotional strain and ultimately to fail (Russell, 1980). In essence, adolescence is a period of search and instability for all males, but those who father children are thrust into a set of conditions which severely complicates their lives.

Methodological Considerations and Challenges

The research literature on fathers employs a variety of methodologies and theoretical frameworks. It emerges from several disciplines including sociology, psychology, social work, and public health. Each of the disciplines overlap and intersect as they strive to make sense of the experiences of fatherhood. Sociologists, conceptualizing families as small social systems, have been interested in how the structure of married and unmarried couples *(dyads)* is transformed with the addition of a new member *(triads)* (Hobbs & Wimbush, 1977). The redefinition of roles and values as well as emergent patterns of social interactions which take place during the transition to fatherhood are also examples of the nature of inquiry for sociologists. Psychologists, public health researchers and social workers have investigated the developmental aspects of the transition to fatherhood (Barnhill et al., 1977; Wente & Crockenberg, 1976) as well as the impact of pregnancy and childbirth on fathers' emotional well-being and mental health (Colby & James, 1976; Klein, 1985). In addition, social and behavioral scientists have studied general perceptions of marriage, family and children (Mackey et al., 1992). Clearly, a considerable amount of the recent research on the transition to fatherhood cuts across the boundaries of traditional academic disciplines.

Pleck and his colleagues (1992) make a distinction between three research designs: cross-sectional; longitudinal but not comparative; and longitudinal-comparative.

Cross-sectional comparisons of couples with and without children and longitudinal studies comparing first-time parents to childless, nonexpectant couples represent a large proportion of the traditional research on the transition to parenthood, but have occasionally led to questionable findings. According to Pleck et al., longitudinal-comparative studies, which possess methodological advantages over cross-sectional comparisons, have produced inconsistent findings, but there have been far fewer studies which used the longitudinal-comparative design. These authors maintain that further comparative-longitudinal research on parenthood and marital adjustment is needed.

Feminist theory contributes to progressive ways of conceptualizing fatherhood through its critique of traditional values and antiquated perspectives affecting women (Jacobs, 1994). By reframing the relationships between males and females in society, feminist theory challenges us to rethink conventional approaches to research and practice. It allows us to move beyond limited definitions of what it means to be a mother or to be a father and to reevaluate previously untested assumptions about how individuals, families, and the larger society work. Thus, feminist theory places gender at the center of the analysis in order to provide a framework for understanding the ways in which race/ethnicity, gender and social class interact to create the kinds of relationships and family structures that are present in society (Jacobs, 1994).

Much of the research on fatherhood has been affected by three methodological problems: 1) the lack of representative samples of fathers; 2) the lack of control groups; and 3) the lack of ethnic/racial diversity among study participants. Many studies select participants from prenatal clinics, family planning centers, colleges and universities, and Lamaze classes (Barnhill et al., 1979; Colby & James, 1976; Hyssälä et al., 1992; Klein, 1985; Mackey et al., 1992; Wente & Crockenberg, 1976). It is conceivable that fathers and expectant fathers who volunteer to participate in these studies can differ from nonvolunteers in significant ways. Volunteer fathers and expectant fathers might be more committed to their relationships with their partners, more interested in the development and growth of their children, and overall more motivated to acquire knowledge about pregnancy and childrearing than nonvolunteers. In any case, studies which analyze relatively small, selective, nonrandom samples are severely limited in the degree to which they can draw generalizable inferences.

Several studies on the transition to fatherhood analyze data without the benefit of comparison groups (Belsky et al., 1985; Colby & James, 1976; Hyssälä et al., 1992; Klein, 1985; Wente & Crockenberg, 1976). Although these studies are often clinical in nature and offer valuable information, it is uncertain how to gauge the scope of their conclusions without matched statistical controls. However, some researchers investigating the dynamics of couples' transition into parenthood were able to create control groups (Cowan et al., 1985). In addition, a number of researchers have taken advantage of national longitudinal data sources in their quest to understand this dimension of fatherhood (Furstenberg et al., 1987; King, 1994; Pleck et al, 1995).

In addition to the lack of matched comparison groups, research focusing on African Americans and Hispanics is seldom conducted. Leading research in this area was conducted on married, white couples only (Belsky et al., 1983; Belsky et al., 1985). Researchers who did study African American couples often used models that were designed using information based on "white couples only" research (Hobbs & Wimbush, 1977). Many studies make no mention of

ethnicity/race, and conduct no analysis examining such group differences (Colby & James, 1976; Goldberg et al., 1985; Mackey et al., 1992; Miller & Sollie, 1980; Osofsky & Culp, 1989).

On the other hand, research on adolescent parenthood more often documents race/ethnic and cultural differences in the transition to parenthood across subgroups (Danziger & Radin, 1990; Dore & Dumois, 1990; Jacobs, 1994; Lorenzi et al., 1977). In fact, the focus of recent research on adolescent pregnancy and parenting has been on African Americans and Hispanics, usually from lower socioeconomic groups.

STABILITY AND CHANGE IN THE TRANSITION TO PARENTHOOD: SOME NORMAL STRESSORS

It would be somewhat misleading to discuss current knowledge of the transition to fatherhood without also elaborating on the transition to motherhood and to parenthood in general, because there are important areas of overlap. At the same time, however, it has been shown that men and women do have markedly different experiences in marriage and that the path to parenthood is different for males and females (Cowan et al., 1985; Goldberg et al., 1985). Within the parenting domain, mothers and fathers tend to have different perceptions of their child and adopt different styles of interacting with their child (Goldberg et al., 1985). Moreover, more is known about the transition to motherhood than the transition to fatherhood, and researchers must use knowledge of the former to inform our thinking about the latter. In addition, while gender affects and interacts with the transition to parenthood there are some important similarities between mothers and fathers. For example, there is evidence that both men and women experience changes in emotional (satisfaction) and functional (division of labor) aspects of their marriage as part of their transition to parenthood (Goldberg et al., 1985). The ways in which these aspects of the relationship change, however, can differ between males and females.

The preponderance of the research literature in this area suggests that, for both mother and father, the initial transition to parenthood produces psychological stress, can have a negative impact on marital quality, and augments conflict and change (Belsky et al., 1983; Cowan et al., 1985; Goldberg et al., 1985; Hobbs & Wimbush, 1977; McHale & Huston, 1985; Miller & Sollie, 1977). Of course, the length of time marriages remain in decline depends on the nature of the relationship prior to the arrival of the child. Cowan and her colleagues maintain that overall marital satisfaction for mothers and fathers declines over the first 15 years following the birth of the child and then begins to rise again as their child gains independence. It is not the child, nor change per se, that is responsible for martial conflict, but rather the increased gender differentiation between partners. Goldberg and his colleagues suggest that changes in the division of labor can account for different levels of satisfaction between fathers and mothers. This is evident in the fact that fathers and mothers make clear that often the most satisfying aspect of their transition to parenthood is the relationship established with their child (Cowan et al., 1985). There is also evidence that the level of parental involvement with the child is connected to marital satisfaction (Goldberg et al., 1985).

In a longitudinal study of 67 couples (Belsky et al., 1985), a decline in marital quality was found to be more prevalent among wives than among husbands. These researchers attribute this finding to the fact that women reported higher levels of satisfaction with their marriage prior to the

birth of their baby, but once their child was born, mothers' contentment fell sharply.

More generally, it has been suggested that traditional sex-role ideology is a major determinant of family work; that most women want their male partners to do more family work; and that male partners are much more psychologically involved in their paid work role than in the family role (Pleck, 1985). Mothers are often less satisfied in their marriages during the initial transition to parenthood because they traditionally have the responsibility of being caregivers; whereas fathers are permitted to simply be their child's playmates. As a result, greater involvement with the child leads to better marital adjustment for fathers, and conversely, greater commitment to caregiving leads to overall lower marital adjustment. In any case, mens' overall psychological involvement as parents increases as their children grow older, but relative to the mothers' involvement, theirs is usually much less (Cowan et al., 1985). This is evident in the tendency for women's work outside of the home to slow down, or stop altogether, in the months and years following the birth of the child; while men work even more during that time.

Of course the literature also reveals positive effects of becoming a parent. Miller and Sollie (1977) found that both mothers and fathers report having a baby increased their sense of interdependence and brought the couple closer together. In a sense, couples who work well and are well integrated before the birth of their child, can increase their satisfaction after the birth of their child. In addition, Miller and Sollie found that some parents experience a *"baby honeymoon"* during which time they welcome the changes and conflicts associated with adjusting to a new family structure.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF FATHER INVOLVEMENT: ADDRESSING GAPS IN THE LITERATURE

Compared to mothers, fathers are dramatically underrepresented in the research literature on the effects of parental involvement and influences on adolescent and child development. However, in the past decades there has been increased interest in the study of father-child relationships. More recently, the focus has narrowed to a general concern about the scope of effects of father involvement (Lamb, Pleck, & Levine, 1985). Phares and Compas (1992) analyzed child and adolescent research in eight journals from 1984 to 1991 and found that nearly one half of the studies dealt only with mothers and 1% of the studies exclusively involved fathers. The remaining studies involved both parents either analyzing them separately or combining them and not specifying gender. According to Phares (1992), the lack of investigation into the effects of the father on the development of his child contributed to the problem of pervasive *"mother-blaming"* in developmental theory. Because we know more about how mothers influence child development than the consequences of father involvement, most of the responsibility for childrearing is attributed to mothers. However, Lamb (1986) suggests that fathers and mothers influence their children in similar ways. Further, there is evidence that, early on, infants show very similar patterns of attachment to mothers and fathers, which appear to be due to concordant parenting styles (Phares, 1992). Bozett (1985) maintains that fathers and mothers are both equally compelling attachment figures for newborns and this is apparent in various forms of attachment behavior such as wanting to be held, crying when put down, giggling and smiling. There is general consensus that parental warmth is not distinguishable from maternal warmth in its beneficial effects on child psychosocial

adjustment, social learning, and sex-role development.

Nevertheless, the question of what factors account for the lack of research on fathers' involvement in child development remains. According to Phares (1992), there are at least four key reasons for the paucity of research on fathers: 1) practical issues in the recruitment of fathers to participate as subjects; 2) differential base rates of various forms of paternal and maternal psychosocial pathology; 3) use of theory-driven research based on traditionally sexist assumptions; and 4) research assumptions based on outmoded societal norms.

In regard to practical issues, there is an underlying belief among researchers that mothers are far less difficult than fathers to recruit for study. As a result of this assumption, the impact of a father's involvement on his child's development is inferred from what occurs during his absence rather than measured directly (Kotelchuck, 1976). In other words, fatherhood is often studied second-hand, through reports of the mothers about paternal behavior, experiences and attitudes (Phares, 1992). Yet, researchers understand that the father-absent paradigm cannot yield accurate accounts of the paternal influences on child and adolescent development (Pedersen, 1976; Phares, 1992). Nonetheless, the assumptions that fathers would refuse to participate in studies about their experiences, needs, and outlook for the future has been largely untested. In fact, on occasions when fathers were actively recruited for participation in research, their response rates were similar to those of mothers (Phares, 1992). According to Phares, researchers have to be willing to conduct their work in the father's home or other alternative sites in order to improve father participation.

Some areas of research on parents' role in the development of their children investigates the prevalence of psychological and social pathologies such as depression, insomnia, alcoholism and various forms of antisocial behavior. Many of these pathologies interact with gender so that their presence differs among fathers and mothers. For example, women are more commonly diagnosed with disorders characterized by internal conflicts such as depression and simple phobias, whereas men are typically diagnosed with acting-out disorders such as anti-social personality disorders and substance abuse (Phares, 1992). However, there are some pathologies that have no identifiable relation to gender, such as schizophrenia and physical abuse of children. Both men and women are equally susceptible to these. Thus, psychologists investigating linkages between parental and child pathologies would need to find cases where both are affected by the same disorder. Since the presence of certain pathologies are not uniform across male and female parents, mothers and fathers are not recruited for research on these pathologies at the same rate.

Another factor contributing to the disproportionate representation of mothers and fathers in research is the general reliance upon sexist theories. According to Phares (1992), sexist research is that which is based on largely unexamined notions about the sexes and that institutes unequal treatment of male and female subjects during any phase of the research project. Unequal treatment of the sexes includes omitting one or the other from the investigation. Phares posits that single-sex research is primarily conducted because of a false assumption that certain topics are only relevant for one sex. An example here is that research on social and emotive influences on child development has typically focused on females, while research on aggression has focused on males (McHugh et al., 1986).

Finally, similar to reliance upon sexist theories in conducting research on parents is the influence of assumptions based on

outdated societal norms and gender stereotypes. These general assumptions cover many areas and include the belief that fathers have no role in caregiving; fathers spent insignificant amounts of time with their children; and that fathers do not affect child maladjustment (Phares, 1992). Reliance upon these assumptions has influenced how research is conducted and has allowed research to be a vehicle which maintains the status quo. And, according to Phares, this has led to blaming the mother for any developmental problems the child may encounter. She argues that researchers have given fathers dispensation against family participation, where anything he gives his children (for example, nurturing, emotional involvement) is considered above and beyond his role and can be viewed only in a positive light. Mothers, on the other hand, are expected to devote the bulk of their time to the well-being and development of their children and are therefore seen as the culpable party when a child experiences social or psychological problems (Phares, 1992).

Over the last few decades, women have steadily increased their presence in the labor force. Though some researchers viewed the decision to work as a choice made by mothers, it was more often than not a financial necessity within their families (Thompson & Walker, 1989). However, while both mothers and fathers are both likely to be breadwinners in contemporary society, researchers have often ignored the high rates of maternal employment, assuming mothers to be primary caretakers of children. Along with this assumption is the notion that maternal employment is generally detrimental to child development, child-parent interaction, and marital satisfaction. There is little empirical evidence, however, that maternal employment has a negative effect on these things; and, in fact, maternal and paternal employment are somewhat similar in that job satisfaction for both parents is associated with a more positive family functioning (Barling, 1990).

Another significant change occurring over the past few decades has been an increase of children living in father-absent households (King, 1994). At some point during their childhood, about half of all children will live in single-parent families (Huber & Spitze, 1988). Although nonresident fathers are physically absent from single-parent households, many maintain ties with their children as well as their children's mother. While public sentiment has been in favor of nonresident fathers' involvement in family life, there is limited research evidence of whether their involvement yields positive benefits for children (King, 1994) and for the functioning of the biological family unit. According to King, there are at least five potential ways in which father involvement impacts child development, either in-house or as nonresidents: fathers provide material resources; they instruct and train their children; their general behavior, attitudes and expectations influence their children; and they provide emotional and moral support. Also indirectly, they influence their children by influencing their children's mothers. However, most studies, particularly those based on large national databases, have not been able to detect a significant connection between the nonresident father's contact with his child and the child's well-being (Furstenberg et al., 1987; King, 1994). In a study which did find an association between absent-father involvement and child well-being, it was found also that father contact was beneficial only to the degree that both parents got along fairly well (Hetherington et al., 1978). In any case, current knowledge regarding the impact of nonresident fathers on child development and family functioning is limited.

THE TRANSITION TO FATHERHOOD

Much of the research on the transition to fatherhood has been conducted on married adult males or those in relationships that simulated marriage, and primarily focused on fathers' adjustment to their partners' first pregnancies and childbirth (Barnhill et al., 1979; Bozett, 1985; Wente & Crockenberg, 1976). In addition, some researchers stressed the importance of examining the interdependence of both fathers and mothers as individuals as well as the dynamics of the family as a social system (Osofsky & Culp, 1989; Parke & Tinsley, 1987). Conceptually, just as the general transition to parenthood has been viewed as problematic because of a shift from dyad to triad upon the entry of a child, so too has the transition to fatherhood been conceived in this light. Sociologist Georg Simmel maintained that a three-person social system (*triad*) typically invites two members to oppose the desires and wishes of the third member (Levine, 1959). Because mothers alone bear children, and are immediately involved in the babies' lives, fathers often risk feelings of being intruders within their own families (Wente & Crockenberg, 1976).

According to Osofsky and Culp (1989), there are several aspects of adjustment to the transition to parenthood that are common to both mothers and fathers such as anxiety, feelings of being overwhelmed, and emotional upheaval. They further maintain that significant maturation can occur in both males as well as females as the couple goes through their first pregnancy and childbirth. However, fathers alone report feeling distant from the baby. Because mothers have traditionally taken a leadership role in feeding, cleaning, and clothing the newborn, fathers perceive early on that theirs is an ancillary role in child rearing (Barnhill et al., 1979). Osofsky and Culp contend that these feelings of alienation are normative and dissipate over time, as the competence and maturity level of the father increases. At any rate, expectant fathers believe that at some point decisions about their child's upbringing (health, education, etc.) should be made jointly, and want to become more involved (Hyssälä et al., 1992).

Generally, men are usually excited and proud to learn that their wives are pregnant and they are going to be fathers (Osofsky & Culp, 1989). Although they express pleasure and pride at the prospects of becoming a father (Bozett, 1985), Coley and James (1976) asserted that approaching fatherhood can trigger severe depression, loss of appetite, insomnia, and delusions of illness among expectant fathers. They argue that these feelings among expectant fathers are connected in part to the fear of financial and emotional responsibilities. In addition, several other common stressors such as increasing family responsibilities; sexual conflict with partners; unresolved attitudes concerning their own parents; and the possibility of cementing dysfunctional relationships, increases fathers' anxiety and fears and can lead to marital dissatisfaction (Coley & James, 1976).

In order to understand the impact of the transition to fatherhood on men, it is necessary to seek to understand also the nature of the couples' relationship prior to having a child together, as well as the social and psychological conditions in which they currently live. Osofsky and Culp (1989) stressed that marital quality is a powerful predictor of patterns of fathering; couples who relate well before the birth of their child tend to relate well afterward. However, they also point out that men's and women's satisfaction with marriage change at different rates over time. Though both become less satisfied with their marriage after having a baby, women's satisfaction drops much more markedly than men's. Osofsky and Culp believe that women's marital quality declines

more sharply than their spouses' after the transition to parenthood because they begin marriage with much higher ratings of satisfaction and higher expectations than their husbands.

Barnhill and his colleagues (1979) maintain that the transition to fatherhood can be viewed in terms of six developmental tasks which must be completed. The tasks are generally sequential; however there is much overlap and variation in the order of appearance. The degree to which these tasks are mastered, might suggest whether the transition to fatherhood can be described as a crisis or as a growth period for the father. The critical developmental tasks are: 1) decision-making; 2) mourning for lost freedom; 3) empathetic responding during pregnancy and labor; 4) integrating the new baby at the end of pregnancy; 5) establishing new family boundaries and differentiating from the extended family; and 6) synergizing or establishing a new equilibrium following the mastery of the first five tasks. First, decision-making means that the father needs to decide whether to have a child, or accept the reality that he's going to have one after the fact. In a study of college males, Mackey et al. (1992) found that social and psychological reasons appear to be more important than economic reasons in the decision to become a father. Second, while the father gains new responsibilities, he loses some personal freedom and access to his partner that he might have grown accustomed to, and he must adjust to the new arrangement. Third, expectant fathers must learn to be supportive and nurturant toward their partner during pregnancy and labor. Fourth, at the end of pregnancy the reality of a new family member is cemented. The new father must help to integrate the child into his temporal space and social life. Fifth, fathers must help to redefine family boundaries with regard to the nuclear family, the extended family, and so forth, placing his spouse, his child, and himself within a larger social network. Finally, fathers must synergize, or enhance, the previous five developmental tasks into a coherent lifestyle where a new equilibrium is established.

In regard to their children, fathers have traditionally seen their primary roles as instrumental, rather than expressive roles (Bozett, 1985; Gadsden & Smith, 1994). They perceived their major responsibilities as being able to provide material resources, shelter and guidance to their children—leaving the affective and emotive domains to their children's mothers. However, the roles attached to fatherhood are changing in that fathers are now increasing their involvement in the nurturance and caretaking of their children (Parke, 1981). Caretaking involves not only feeding, cleaning and grooming the baby, but also activities such as reading to the child and becoming a playmate. These expressive roles are taken on, along with the fulfillment of the traditional, instrumental functions of the role of father (Bozett, 1985).

As the child grows older, new concerns and adjustments for the father emerge. While the child goes through a series of developmental stages on the path to adulthood, at the same time fathers are progressing through adulthood. Often the developmental stages of the father do not coincide neatly with the developmental stages of their children (Bozett, 1985). Middle-aged fathers undergoing a redefinition of their life (reflecting on their accomplishments, careers, families and futures) might have children who are progressing through their own tumultuous adolescence, grappling with problems of educational performance, sexuality, and identity. This can lead to father-child conflict in that both father and child are experiencing their individualized forms of identity crisis and role redefinition at the same time.

Although the transition to fatherhood, with all of its dynamics, represents a normal progression on the path to adulthood, some researchers maintain that it can be affected by the lack of preparation men receive for the father role (Barnhill et al., 1979; Klein, 1985; Wente & Crockenberg, 1976). They believe that the socialization of young boys and adolescent males often does not go beyond teaching them instrumental fathering responsibilities, so that by the time they transition into fatherhood, basic knowledge and skills are still lacking. Because men seldom receive formal training on how to be an effective father, they either mimic adult role models they had as children (for example, their own fathers), learn to be good parents by doing, or diminish their involvement with the child. In order to better prepare men for fatherhood, thereby easing the stress of their transition, some researchers and family planning practitioners advocate group therapy, prepared childbirth classes, and similar forms of support services (Barnhill et al., 1979; Klein, 1985; Wente & Crockenberg, 1976). However, admittedly, there is consensus within the research community that at this juncture, father training programs have shown no consistent evidence of significantly easing the transition to fatherhood.

TRANSITION TO THE ROLE OF FATHER AMONG ADOLESCENTS

The transition to fatherhood for adolescents can be viewed as part of their broader transition to adulthood. In order to place adolescent fatherhood in its proper context, it is necessary to lay out an overview of the research both on adolescent motherhood and on adolescent parenthood in general. Among many cultures, becoming a parent is practically synonymous with becoming an adult. However, becoming a parent during the teenage years is commonly perceived as an early role transition in that the normal procession through the life cycles have been taken out of sequence. Because society is biased toward the "*normal family cycle*" which assumes marriage before parenthood (Russell, 1980), and secondary school completion before marriage, adolescent parents deviate from prevailing ideas about the order in which one ought to transition through life's major social roles.

At the outset, it is important to note that many of the children born to adolescent mothers are fathered by men who are themselves not teenagers (Sonenstein, 1986). It was recently documented that about only one-third of the children of teenage mothers are fathered by adolescent males, while the remaining two-thirds of the fathers are adult men over 20 years old (National Center for Health Statistics, 1990). However, the plight of teenage fathers ought not to be downplayed because, as compared to their adult counterparts, adolescent fathers have fewer resources to accept responsibility for their children, in terms of both their maturity and ability to provide psychological and financial support (Pleck et al., 1995). Thus, the ramifications of out-of-wedlock childbearing for fathers can be more severe during adolescence than later in life.

The role of parent is fundamental to every society. Adolescent parents are likely to be less prepared than first-time adult parents and are likely to experience greater stress. According to Russell (1980), teenage parents initiate their sexual and parental careers early, often before marriage, and sometimes altogether without a marital career. The absence of marriage places the primary source of support for the adolescent parent (mother) and child on the family of origin, extended family, or public welfare systems. But, in any case, the primary responsibility for the care of the child historically rests with the its young mother. Thus, a situation is created where adolescents either forego

further education or attempt a "triple track" pattern of undertaking education, work, and parenthood simultaneously in order to survive and raise their children (Russell, 1980).

The research literature points to several possible reasons why adolescents transition early to parenthood; however, the focus is primarily on females. Conventional wisdom is that teenage childbearing is most often premarital, unplanned, and unwanted (National Research Council: Panel on Adolescent Pregnancy and Childbearing, 1987; Russell, 1980). Some researchers maintain that teenagers engage in sexual activity in pursuit of separation and individuation from their parents, or in order to try out new adult roles, while not taking into account the many risks involved (Jacobs, 1994).

However, recent research on teenage mothers reveals that not all pregnancies occurring among adolescents are unplanned. Some adolescent females view motherhood as a plausible and direct path to adulthood wherein they are respected by their peers (Jacobs, 1994). These adolescents feel intrinsically rewarded by the attention they receive from others, affection and warmth given them by their babies, and a new sense of responsibility and independence that accompanies parenting. For these parents, mostly mothers, other avenues through which adolescents typically gain self-esteem and a sense of self-worth, such as in their families of origin, in academics, athletics, and religious organizations, have been perceived to be blocked.

On the topic of the consequences of teenage childbearing, Geronimus (1991) raised relevant questions that shed light on the complexities of the causes and effects of an early transition to parenthood. According to Geronimus, simple correlational studies have repeatedly shown a connection between teenage parenting and socioeconomic disadvantage (whether measured as educational attainment, income, marital status, etc.) and as a result, the effects of early parenthood are often attributed to causing these outcomes. However, teenage childbearing is itself an outcome of disadvantaged socioeconomic conditions. Even before pregnancy occurs, there are qualitative differences (such as family structure, educational aspirations, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status) between adolescents who will become teenage parents and those who will not. Geronimus maintains that: "At a minimum, the existence of such pre-existing differences suggest that simple comparisons exaggerate true causation. Their existence leaves open the possibility that, despite the documented statistical association between early childbearing and poor outcomes, teen childbearing, in and of itself, may not contribute to poor outcomes." (p. 464) Empirically disentangling the true effects of adolescent childbearing from the contribution of prior disadvantage is a methodologically difficult task (Geronimus, 1991).

Regardless of what factors contribute to adolescents becoming parents, the consequences of their early transition are often severe, especially for those from lower and working class families. The transition to parenthood for adolescents more accurately fits the "crisis" conceptual model than older first-time parents (Russell, 1980). Adolescent parents often downwardly adjust their educational and career aspirations as a result of childbirth; and many postpone their dreams for the future indefinitely. Typically, taking on the parental role puts adolescents' personal and social development, educational attainment, and economic self-sufficiency considerably off schedule. Many adolescent parents find it extremely difficult, even with the support of families of origin and social agencies, to get back on course as their

development into adulthood progresses. In addition, early motherhood in particular has been associated with a high incidence of poverty, marital disruption, and a low educational attainment—and, the younger the mother, the higher the incidence of each of the outcomes (Russell, 1980).

On the other hand there is some evidence that young, unscheduled parenthood does not relegate all adolescent parents to a life of destitution, despair, and disappointment (Furstenberg et al., 1987). With appropriate intervention, many teenage parents are able to adjust well to their early transition by reorganizing their lives and making progress toward their personal goals. According to Russell (1980), two key variables help determine the degree to which adolescent mothers are able to successfully get back onto their development paths to adulthood: resuming their educational careers and establishing a healthy, long-standing relationship with their baby's father. By becoming reinvested in their schooling, mothers will be exposed again to peers who are at a developmentally similar place in their lives; those peers could encourage mothers to reestablish their goals and aspirations for the future. Maintaining relationships with their babies' fathers, however, is a somewhat controversial matter. While some researchers believe ideally that including the adolescent father is important for providing the child the kind of support and stability needed for healthy development (Russell, 1980), others are convinced it is generally not a good idea for teenage mothers to marry, especially within the initial few years following childbirth. In one study (Lorenzi et al., 1977), 65% of the participants who married their babies' fathers within two years postpartum had one or more subsequent pregnancies—about half of these girls dropped out of school. The researchers encourage teenage parents to delay both marriage and additional pregnancies, and to focus instead on their schooling, career development, and caring for their child. Overall, the consensus within the research community is that encouraging teenage mothers to marry the father of their child is a bad idea.

For some adolescent fathers, participation in the lives of their children is complicated because their children's mothers have had multiple children fathered by other men. These relationships are often strained as a result of role confusion, logistics, emotional conflict, and overlapping interests of both the adolescents and their families of origin. Of course, the greater the number of children involved, the greater the likelihood of conflict, confusion, and maladaptation. Understanding that adolescence is a period of testing one's borders, searching for meaning, identity crises, discovery, and resistance to authority, teenagers are bound to demonstrate poor judgment from time to time. To this end, schools and other social agencies must allow them second chances and alternative paths to a successful adult life. When adolescents fall off-track as a result of an accelerated transition to adult roles, it is in the interest of society to keep the window open for them to become re-engaged in normal developmental activities and to rebuild their hope for the future. There is some research evidence that career education and training is one of the vehicles through which adolescent parents can learn the necessary skills and knowledge to enable them to improve their future life chances (Howell & Frese, 1982).

For adolescent parents, families of origin are key influences on the transition to parenthood; but their influence can ease or complicate the transition. Families of origin can contribute to a less tumultuous early transition by providing a supportive and encouraging environment for teenage parents to learn parenting skills, progress in their schoolwork, and resume some normal adolescent activities. However, by

withdrawing support, or ostracizing the adolescent parent, families of origin can increase the difficulty of their transition to parenthood.

Cultural Perspectives

Adolescent childbearing is not a phenomenon that is uniform across diverse racial/ethnic and cultural groups. Cultural differences in the causes, experiences, and adjustments to adolescent childbearing are expected because of the prevalence of differences in other areas of social life such as education. For example, studies of aspirations have found that African Americans often have higher educational aspirations than whites (Dore & Dumois, 1990; MacLeod, 1987). Fertility behavior is also subject to cultural differences; a higher proportion of pregnancies among Hispanics result in births, as compared to pregnancies among African Americans and whites (Pleck et al., 1995). Intuitively, we know that family functioning, role definitions, and expectancies vary across cultures. However, existing research affords little guidance in understanding the significance of how different racial/ethnic and cultural groups view and adjust to the transition to parenthood among adolescents. In studying adolescent pregnancy, more attention has been paid to variables such as the mother's and father's age and social class than to the effects of ethnic/racial or cultural differences. Unfortunately, most studies of teenage pregnancy and parenting focus primarily on the experiences of African American females, not taking into account their Hispanic, white, or Asian counterparts (Dore & Dumois, 1990).

Like most research on parenthood, many of these studies are based on convenience samples which evaluate, for example, the effectiveness of interventions designed for inner-city teenage females who participate in specific programs where they receive counseling and other services or are scheduled to receive public assistance for prenatal or afterbirth care. These studies often do not tell us how patterns of adaptation and perceptions of parenthood differ across ethnic/race and culture. The problem here is that appreciation and understanding of cultural differences is an essential component of sound research and practice (Dore & Dumois, 1990). Differences between adolescents from racial/ethnic and culturally diverse backgrounds must be taken into account in order to best help them and to more fully understand the etiologies of their early transition to parenthood.

There is not a great deal of empirical research showing the degree to which the behavior and consequences of being an adolescent parent differs across racial/ethnic and culturally different groups. However, Pleck, Sonenstein and Ku (1995) provide some evidence of differences in fertility behavior among African American, Hispanic and white adolescent males. Their study explored the "risk inhibition" hypothesis which maintains that actual experience with pregnancy raises the awareness of adolescent males that unprotected sexual intercourse can have negative consequences. The rationale of this hypothesis is that real experience with pregnancy should reduce future instances of risky sexual activity among young men. Surprisingly, Pleck and his colleagues found the opposite result—that involvement in a pregnancy increases (rather than decreases) the likelihood that adolescent males would engage in risky sexual behavior. The study also yielded interesting cross-cultural information. For example, African American and Hispanics in the sample were informed that they were expectant fathers more frequently than white adolescents. This pattern held in cases in which the pregnancy was fact, as well as when the pregnancy was merely a "scare." In addition, the researchers also found that first births occurred most

frequently among Hispanic teenagers, "reflecting that a far higher proportion of pregnancies resulted in births in Hispanics than in the other groups." (p.8)

Cultural perspectives on adolescent pregnancy and parenting are shaped by broader social patterns and by the ways in which people go about organizing their world. Dore and Dumois (1990) maintain that there are stark cultural differences in the way families are oriented and that these differences matter. They assert, for example, that African American families, particularly those in poverty, are less rigidly bound than white families and can more easily accommodate a new and unanticipated child. This is manifested in the fact that informal adoption is common practice in poor African American communities, reflecting the cultural value inherent in every child. If this is true, African American teenagers who become pregnant place somewhat less strain on their families of origin than their White counterparts. In contrast, White families are more likely than other ethnic/racial groups to pursue formal adoption. Research evidence suggest that African Americans hesitate to consider adoption because they have traditionally been denied access to adoption resources (Dore & Dumois, 1990). Among many poor African American families, the extended family structure and larger networks of close friends have traditionally provided a web of social support for the children of adolescent parents, as well as the adolescent parents themselves. However, there is some speculation that this web of support has been steadily deteriorating.

Cultural groups help define the meaning of roles for its members and attach social value to each role. All cultures place a high value on parenting, but differences exist on what is considered the appropriate time to become a parent. However, there is some consistency between cultures that the teenage years are less than an ideal time to bear children. Among Hispanic cultures, the role of mother has a high value, and a "good mother" centers her life around her family, sacrificing her own needs for the needs of others (Dore & Dumois, 1990). Other cultures are similar to Hispanics in this regard, placing the role of the mother at the center of the family. However, as mentioned earlier, whereas the mother's domain was seen as primarily emotive and affective, the father's domain is typically characterized as instrumental (Goldberg et al., 1985). Generally, adolescent parents are held accountable for these culturally-defined roles even though there may be practical reasons why they are not able to fulfill them.

The Adolescent Transition to Motherhood

Though the adolescent transition to parenthood for males and females has some similarities for each sex, the experiences of teenage mothers are obviously different than those of fathers because gender socialization, biological endowment, and cultural imperatives create a fundamentally distinct set of circumstances for each. The purpose of this and the next section is to examine how the transition to motherhood and to fatherhood affects adolescents. However, because motherhood and fatherhood are inextricably connected to each other this discourse is integrated.

As noted above, much of the research on adolescent pregnancy and motherhood has been conducted on economically disadvantaged, typically minority females, and its scope is limited in this regard. Nevertheless, this research contains some evidence that self-image plays a critical role in the early transition to motherhood. The adult roles in which adolescent females envision themselves affect their sexual behavior and this ultimately influences their likelihood of pregnancy and parenthood (Shtarkshall, 1987). Moreover, female and male sexuality

during adolescence represents the expression of a desire to assume adult status (Jacobs, 1994). In one study of low SES teenage mothers conducted in Israel, Shtarkshall found that economically disadvantaged females, projecting into their future, see themselves primarily in the role of mother. Motherhood was highly valued among these female adolescents, although most had not intended to become mothers at this stage of their lives. An overwhelming majority of teenage pregnancies are unwanted. In any case, there was a somewhat direct daughter-to-mother transition among adolescents in their thinking about the future, which excluded such roles as spouse, or career woman.

Why do poor and minority adolescent females decide to make an early transition to motherhood? According to Shtarkshall (1987), there are at least three major reasons why adolescent females transition immediately to motherhood without considering or pursuing other requisite adult roles. These reasons include: the fact that poor adolescent females might perceive children as not only objects to love, but also sources of love, strength, and support; that motherhood helps to build their self-image and self-esteem; and adolescent females might imagine themselves in adult roles other than mother, but lack knowledge of how to fulfill those roles (Shtarkshall, 1987). Also, because some teenage females have personally suffered abuse and neglect within their families of origin, they might view the transition to motherhood as an escape from bad psychological conditions. These young women believe that their own children would offer them unconditional love and affection, and demand of them new responsibilities that can add new meaning to their lives.

Conceivably, adolescent females also allow themselves to become pregnant because of an apparent need to improve their self-image and self-esteem. After the birth of their child, some teenage mothers experience changes in the relationship with their families of origin, particularly their own parents. Although they can be legally and socially defined as children, upon becoming parents adolescents move toward being treated more like adults than children, and this new respect from significant others pleases them (Jacobs, 1994). In addition, while an early transition to motherhood can be extremely stressful and unpredictable for adolescents, becoming a mother carries with it the acquisition of adult status. Thus, while added responsibilities and demands are tied to motherhood, so too are certain liberties and privileges, such as being treated as an adult. Because they are poor and might lack access to social, educational, and career opportunities, some adolescent females might view motherhood as the only viable path to adulthood. Social mobility and acquisition of adult status through educational attainment, career advancement, marriage, and the like might be viewed as unavailable avenues for those who opt for motherhood. It matters little whether the opportunities for these adolescents are real or perceived—the consequences would be the same. According to Mackey et al. (1992), if given control of their reproductive decisions, and allowed access to gainful employment, women will limit their childbearing and make use of the cash economy.

In addition to the above reasons why adolescent females might allow themselves to become pregnant, they are sometimes lured into having a child by their sexual partners. This can occur because the adolescent female, or her male companion, successfully use pregnancy as a method of cementing their transitory relationships. Because males who impregnate adolescent females are not always adolescents themselves often they are much older (Belsky & Miller, 1986) adolescent females are sometimes attracted to the appearance of financial and social stability and the level of maturity in the sexual partner.

Although there are critical gaps between core values and behavior (thought and action) adolescent values, educational aspirations and career goals exert some influence over their sexual behavior. Among female adolescents, researchers have discovered a connection between low self-esteem, lack of career focus and educational motivation on the one hand, and risk-taking behavior leading to pregnancy on the other (Bassoff & Ortiz, 1984). Thus the belief that one has a chance to achieve success in life can serve as a social contraceptive for adolescent females.

Within the context of a feminist framework, adolescent sexual behavior, pregnancy and motherhood can also be conceptualized as a fundamental developmental need for autonomy and attachment (Jacobs, 1994). Viewed in this light, sexual intimacy is a step toward separation and individuation from parental control; it is the first step toward motherhood. Interpersonal relationships with members of the opposite sex (intimacy and sexuality) is one of the arenas in which adolescents act out adult roles, often without guidance or the influence of their parents or other caring adults. Although most adolescent females who engage in sexual intercourse do not want to become pregnant, they are usually aware that such activity can cause pregnancy. However, for some the desire to establish personal independence outweighs the risks involved, and ultimately some become teenage mothers.

According to Jacobs (1994), the adolescent social life is carried out through secrecy, rebelliousness, and non-disclosure, particularly among middle class, white females. This includes adolescents withholding information from parents about their social and sexual relationships. Many familial problems can arise from this cloud of secrecy, such as the avoidance of using birth control among sexually active teenagers because of the fear that one's parents may discover it and disapprove. In any case, there is some research evidence that adolescent females who engaged in premarital sex are more critical of parental controls and more inclined to believe that adults do not understand their needs and challenges (Ladner, 1972). The fact that they engage in sexual activity is a strong indicator of parental defiance because few parents approve of sexual relations among their teenagers. However, as Jacobs points out, despite evidence of engaging in sexual activity as a form of rebellion among middle class, white adolescents, defiance of parental controls has not been able to explain sexual behavior and childbearing among African American and Hispanic females.

The social and cultural reproduction of adolescent parents has also been documented in the research literature (Jacobs, 1994). As in other areas of social life where parents and families can transfer values, attitudes and modes of adaptation to their children, there is a tendency among daughters of teenage mothers to themselves become teenage mothers. Some researchers attribute the occurrence of teenage pregnancy in single-parent households to an inability among mothers to supervise their teenage daughters (Hogan & Kitagawa, 1985). This perspective was derived from a cultural deficit model which describes the African American family as generally deviant, lacking the ability to properly socialize its children (Moynihan, 1965). In essence, women who were teenage mothers themselves were perceived as being more permissive of their daughter's sexual activity, or as being either incompetent in shaping their children's development, or looking the other way as their daughters engage sexual behaviors that risk pregnancy.

This perspective, however, is by no means a consensus among researchers. In fact, some researchers question whether former teenage mothers are any less concerned about the sexuality of their

adolescent children than those who transitioned to motherhood as adults. According to Furstenberg et al. (1987), former adolescent mothers are very concerned about the interpersonal relations and sexual conduct of their daughters as well as their sons, and they will often encourage abstinence or the use of contraception.

The Adolescent Transition to Fatherhood

Finally, the transition to fatherhood can be stressful at any age (Osofsky & Culp, 1989). Fathering in the adolescent years produces added difficulties because, like teenage mothers, adolescent fathers are already in a volatile stage of life (Robinson, 1988). Adolescent fathers are often ill-equipped to take on new roles and responsibilities associated with financially and emotionally supporting their children while continuing their own development into adulthood. There is clear research evidence that males who father children as teenagers are less likely than those who do not become fathers to complete high school, and this finding appears to be consistent across all ethnic/racial groups (Marsiglio, 1986). In addition, lower educational attainment levels among teenage fathers often translate into less desirable jobs and lower earnings as adults, and overall higher unemployment rates.

Conventional wisdom about the profile of adolescent fathers has been filled with stereotypes of them as being self-centered, uncaring males primarily interested in conquering young females and in their own sexual gratification. Teenage fathers were viewed as socially and emotionally insecure males, who exhibit their masculinity and resolve conflict of their sexual identity through irresponsible behavior that risked pregnancy of their female partner (Pannor et al., 1971).

There is, however, some research evidence that refutes this perception of adolescent fathers. In fact, according to Robinson (1988), there are few attitudinal and behavioral differences between males who will become adolescent fathers and those who will not. Belsky and Miller (1986) found that adolescent fathers are more likely to be employed and have a disposable income than their age-mates, but because of differences in education and training their age-mates eventually catch up and surpass them in earnings. Also, there is some evidence that teenage fathers are more likely to be born without the benefit of wedlock themselves. Nevertheless, prior to fathering, males who will become teenage fathers and their nonfather counterparts look strikingly similar to each other (Robinson, 1988). According to Robinson, their attitudes, sexual knowledge and behavior, and a variety of psychological variables such as locus of control, self-image, intellectual functioning, frequency of intercourse, and knowledge of contraception differ very little.

The news of impending fatherhood accelerates the role development of adolescent males; but the similarities between fathers and non-fathers greatly decreases over time. Whereas non-fathers can remain committed to educational, personal and social pursuits, adolescent fathers are expected to split their commitment between personal growth and involvement with their children. Some researchers describe the emotional condition of teenage males during this initial transition to early fatherhood as depressed, socially isolated, afraid and angry. These feelings, however, are often mixed with pride and happiness which are not as pronounced as the despair they feel (Robinson, 1988). Further, some adolescent fathers participate in the excitement surrounding the birth of the baby, but are unable to sustain their involvement in the long run (Danziger & Radin, 1990). One of the reasons this occurs is because the realization of the actual obligations and responsibilities of parenting become clearer to

adolescent fathers and they find that they lack the competence, financial stability, and maturity necessary to help their children and their children's mother.

Robinson (1988) suggests that after the initial shock of the announcement of pregnancy wears off, one of the greatest stressors for adolescent fathers is being left in the dark when decisions about his baby are being made, primarily by the mother and her parents, without his input. Since adolescent fathers are very likely to live apart from their baby's mother, they feel alienated, inconsequential, and unable to become meaningfully involved in their child's life, especially in the early years. In this view, young fathers are more often blocked out and pushed away from their children by their child's mother and her family of origin—much less often do they flat out abandon their children.

The presence of the adolescent mother's own parents at home reduces the chance that the baby's father will be meaningfully involved in childrearing (Danziger & Radin, 1990). However as Danziger and Radin have found, men other than the baby's biological father, such as new boyfriends, uncles, or grandfathers, sometimes substitute as father figures for children born to adolescents. Of course, those who are situated in close proximity to the adolescent mother's baby are better able than those at a distance to decide how childrearing should be carried out. By virtue of being non-resident, adolescent fathers are placed at a disadvantage for meaningful involvement. Clearly, teenage mothers and their families of origin serve as gatekeepers for father involvement (Belsky & Miller, 1986).

In addition to families of origin, several other factors influence adolescent father involvement. In a study of single-parent families, Danziger and Radin (1990) found that: joblessness can hurt adolescent father participation; the younger the child, the greater the father's involvement; and younger, rather than older males are more involved in their babies' lives. Other research has found that the dimensions and health of the relationship between the adolescent male and female prior to the pregnancy (length of courtship, frequency of intercourse, exclusivity, number of other sexual partners, etc.) serve to influence the father's involvement after childbirth (Belsky & Miller, 1986). In general, adolescent males who were psychologically committed to their female partner prior to pregnancy often want to be involved at some level in childrearing; while uncommitted, promiscuous fathers may have little interest in parenting or establishing relationships with their children (Belsky & Miller, 1986). In any event, the more active the adolescent father is in early decision-making, the more involved he will be in the pregnancy and beyond (Robinson, 1988).

In a case study of African American teenage fathers, Hendricks (1980) found that their families of origin were a key source of support during their partners' pregnancy and after subsequent childbirth. In particular, parents of adolescent fathers were highly valued and most frequently engaged as a source of social support and encouragement. Conversely, Hendricks' study also discovered that friends and peers of adolescent fathers were not usually relied upon as possible resources for help with parenting. Religious figures and schoolteachers were also rejected by adolescent fathers as possible sources of support. However, an interesting finding of Hendricks' study is that an overwhelming majority of adolescent fathers reported that they would accept the services of social agencies in areas such as parenting skills, sex education, job training and job placement, if they were aware of these services and were recruited to do so. This provides some evidence that targeted intervention might be a

viable option for adolescent males to ease their transition to fatherhood.

CONCLUSION

This review of literature suggests that the transition to the fatherhood role can be described as a complex set of experiences and adjustments that males undergo upon fathering a child, which can best be understood within the context of their normal progression through life's stages. In addition, the transition to fatherhood takes place within the context of a small social system (the family or dyadic social group), which itself exists within a larger social network (extended families, acquaintances, and communities). This social environment must be taken into account in order to more adequately understand the transition to fatherhood.

There are some methodological limitations in the existing research on the transition to fatherhood. One shortcoming is the lack of father representation in research on parenthood. But in addition to the poor recruitment of fathers and expectant fathers for research, there is an overall lack of systematic, longitudinal investigation at the national level. Most of the research compiled for this review was based on clinical studies comprised of nonrandom, convenience samples. Participants were typically recruited from selective social agencies, college campuses, and narrow catchment areas. Researchers are less able to generalize findings of studies without regionally or nationally representative samples, and cannot explore patterns of consistency and change over time in studies that are not longitudinal. Although the existing body of research on the transition to fatherhood makes an important contribution to research and practice, further investigation that is both nationally representative and longitudinal is needed.

Several implications of the research literature on the transition to fatherhood can be drawn. The most overriding implication is that social policy and intervention programs for new and expectant fathers should be designed to focus on the family as a social unit as well as on the individual. This means that social agencies, both public and private, should provide comprehensive services for fathers and mothers and their families, orientated toward both groups and individuals. Though some researchers advocate prepared childbirth and afterbirth classes for expectant and new couples geared specifically to help fathers adjust to their new roles, there is no clear evidence on the effectiveness of these interventions.

For adolescent males, the early transition to fatherhood is especially challenging. Ameliorating the problem of adolescent fatherhood is troubling because there is some evidence that teenage males who become fathers look very similar to those who do not on several important measures. In other words, it is difficult to predict which adolescent males will father children during their teenage years because engaging in sexual behavior that risks pregnancy was found to be similar among both adolescent fathers and non-fathers. Moreover, once adolescents become fathers there is consensus among researchers that marrying their children's mothers can be even more detrimental to their life chances. Adolescent marriage following pregnancy is strongly discouraged because evidence has shown that additional pregnancies are more likely to occur, educational attainment and employment earnings suffer, and marital conflict and dissatisfaction is probable. In any case, the research literature suggests that adolescent fathers may benefit from various kinds of social interventions such as career training, job placement, and parenting skills. Because adolescence is a period of growth, of testing one's boundaries, searching for identity, and expressing defiance, many teenagers gamble their future, and lose. To

that end, second-chance programs that would assist adolescent fathers in completing their schooling and finding jobs may serve them, and by extension their partners and children, well in the long run.

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